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ABSTRACT

A study was done of racism on college and university campuses in Iowa through the perspectives of college and university administrators and minority student comments. Information was gathered by questionnaire and interview of seven vice presidents working in student affairs and 25 minority students from three different campuses. The administrative participants make policy and represent about one third of the four year colleges and universities in the state. Students and administrators agreed that the source of continued racism on campus was difficult economic times, the need for strong legislative and other leadership, lack of understanding of the problems and perspectives of Black students, and lack of role models for Black students. Four definitions of racism emerged from the research. Administrators and students were split as to whether racism was intentional or simply reflected a lack of sensitivity. Two administrator participants suggested that racism exists among students for several reasons including lack of exposure to minorities, close living environment, fear, few chances to meet, and lack of specific institutional policies against racism. Administrators and students listed 12 types of racial incidents that have occurred. All students felt they had experienced racism on campus. Students and administrators agreed that uneducated and uninformed students were the biggest offenders. Contains four references. (JB)

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Racism On The Iowa Campus:

A Presentation On The

Student Affairs Administrator and Black Student Perspectives

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Unfortunately, not all members of a campus community handle cultural diversity well. It would be wonderful if the participants could view the cultural scene as an anthropologist visiting an unknown culture. This humility seems to be warranted when learning about the culture of minority students. Today, as in the past, many students, faculty and administrators lack that quality of humility. It is easy to forget that even though Blacks and whites operate in the same environment their perception within that environment may be different.

Some literature suggests that colleges and universities are racists in terms of administration, faculty and services. Hollar (1982) stated that racism will continue to be a major force in the life of every minority student. For the most part, experience suggests that racism on the college campus does not seem to be Machiavellian in nature but rather results from a lack of sensitivity to minority needs. Is racism today best defined as a lack of sensitivity - simply a lack of humility? There is a growing concern that the problem is deeper and more difficult to define - and correct.

The purpose of this paper is to examine racism on college and university campuses in Iowa. Racism is defined by examining the perspectives of several college and university vice presidents working in the student affairs area. The paper will also incorporate the comments of minority students. Information was gathered by questionnaire and interview from seven vice presidents working in student affairs and 25 minority students from three different campuses. The information obtained is significant because the administrative participants of the study make policy and represent about one third of the four year colleges and universities in Iowa.

Background

Racism is a fact in the United States. It is part of the society and culture. Since the 1950's, history describes a continuous series of events that have taken place to slow the spread of racism and promote equality for all people. For example since the late

1950's, in an effort to be heard, citizens have demonstrated in the streets and men of stature like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X sought change by both evolution and revolution. Special legislation and programs have been developed by federal and state legislatures to protect the rights of the minority. Special laws and programs guide the hiring process of business and industry by requiring employees to take affirmative action in regard to Equal Opportunity.

Colleges and universities are part of our society. They are a representation of our culture. If racism exists in society than logically it also exists in colleges and universities. The agonizing question is and the question posed to campus administrators was; why hasn't there been more change in the past 20 years? The literature of ten, even twenty years ago suggests racism was alive and well on college campuses, and the concerns of minority students and college administrators then continue to be their concerns today. The question is a complex one. When asked in the study, college administrators provided the following responses:

1. When economic conditions are good and opportunity apparent, the general population tends to accept persons of differing races, creeds, backgrounds and persuasions. The point was also made that in the absence of a healthy environment forces of change must rely on legislation.
2. The government needs to do more, and strong leadership is needed in government and from minority groups.
3. Administration, faculty and staff have not done enough to work toward a permanent solution to the problem. This is best typified by a lack of role models and mentoring programs for minorities.
4. Many of the small colleges in Iowa have a small population of minorities. Many colleges and universities are not aware of problems until something

happens - then they ask why.

Surprisingly the minority students that were interviewed answered the question in somewhat the same way.

1. More legislation and government programs are needed to combat racism in society and on the college campus.

2. The population of Iowa is usually uninformed about Blacks. Many Iowa residents have never had a conversation with a Black person. People need to become educated and learn that all Blacks are not athletes, entertainers or criminals.

3. Administrators do not understand the problems Blacks face. They think if the problem is left alone or if no one complains everything is okay. Administrators need to talk to Blacks and determine need.

4. The lack of role models. The lack of Black professors, Dean of Students and counselors limit the growth and development of Black students.

Defining Racism

Sadly, racism seems to be on the college campus. Racism is different things to different people. It may be subtle or very much to the point. It can hurt, anger, frustrate and embarrass - not only the targets of racism but also those who live and work in a campus community and value the cultural diversity found there. The study produced many definitions of racism.

1. An action or attitude that has as its result less than equal treatment of a

person of color.

2. Racism is the premise that ones own race is superior.
3. Discrimination based on race.
4. The use of power by institutions and persons to deny access of services and opportunities because of skin color.

Interviewees were asked; is racism intentional or simply a lack of sensitivity? Three respondents felt racism was intentional - learned and taught. Two believed racism to be a lack of sensitivity, and two of the administrators felt racism is both intentional and a lack of sensitivity.

Students were split like the administrators. Eleven of the twenty-five felt racism was intentional, nine felt racism was unintentional or a lack of sensitivity and five felt racism was both intentional and a lack of sensitivity.

Carolyn Rants, a Vice President of Student Affairs at Morningside College was quick to point out that racism may affect many different groups depending on location. She pointed out that Native Americans are often the target of discrimination.

Why is racism on campus?

Is racism simply the result of people acting out prejudice or is there definite reasons why racism is on the college and university campus? In a post-conference publication entitled Racial Discrimination on Campus (1988) several conditions that contribute to racial conflict are listed.

1. Declining minority student enrollment.
2. Declining financial aid resources.
3. Increasing competition in admissions, access to classes and majors, and admission to graduate and professional schools.

4. Renewed emphasis on academic excellence.
5. Low minority student retention and graduation rates.
6. Retrenchment of affirmative action programs.
7. A post-civil rights student population which lacks direct experience with the human struggles of the 1960's and has less understanding of and conviction about civil rights.
8. Waning societal commitment to altruism, human rights and social welfare concerns.

Sadly the obvious answer, to why racism is on the campus, is because it exists in society. The mistaken, somewhat elitist notion that colleges and universities are somehow insulated from problems of inequality has fallen by the wayside. Vice Presidents of Student Affairs, Donald Adams of Drake University, Bill Hinga of Central University and Carolyn Rants of Morningside provided the following possible reasons why racism is on the college campus.

1. A close living environment.
2. Lack of previous exposure to minorities.
3. Minority students are operating in a majority environment without role models.
4. Fear of the unknown, different or unfamiliar.
5. Few opportunities for the majority and minority student to meet and begin to know each other.
6. Institutions often lack specific policies against racism. Policies need to be published and enforced. Everyone needs to know racism is unacceptable.

Examples of Racism

It is difficult to believe that racism could operate in a learning environment. Educational institutions not only educate students but also provide a model for living and working with diverse populations. In an effort to determine what kinds of racism are actually taking place on Iowa campuses the interviewees were asked to provide examples of racism that occurred on their campuses. Information was obtained from students and administrators of nine Iowa schools - seven private colleges and two state universities.

1. Black students are treated differently by faculty. Black students feel that professors think that because they are Black they cannot perform well in a particular class. Many advisors try to steer Black students to easier classes.
2. People assume that Blacks are athletes.
3. Interracial dating was suggested to be the largest cause of racist acts on campus.
   * White women who date Black men are often put on a "Black list" and are not approached by white men.
   * Many of the white women get threatening, abusive and vulgar phone calls from Black women and white men and women.
   * The living quarters and personal property of white women have been vandalized.
   * Derogatory statements have been written on residence hall walls.
   * Violence has occurred between white and Black men and between white and Black women.
4. Hiring and promoting in jobs.
5. Black students and International students get less desireable Work study and campus employment jobs than white students.

6. Abusive and vulgar name calling.
7. Theft of International students property.
8. Destruction of International students property.
9. Stereotyping of Native Americans.
10. Racial jokes.
11. An outward feeling or demonstration of racial superiority.
12. An evidenced total lack of understanding of the value of cultural diversity.

All of the administrators interviewed and almost all of the students interviewed felt that things are getting better. Students felt that the administrators do want to stop racism even though there have been occasional flare ups of racism. Administrators felt that they are clarifying their positions on racism and are taking a preventative posture in order to combat it. They are not just sitting around waiting for something to happen in order to react to it.

All of the students felt that they had experienced racism on campus. Most felt their experience was subtle and a lack of sensitivity. However all students knew of cases where the racism displayed took the form of violence and destruction. It is instructional to note that all students felt they could go to the Dean of Students or Vice President of their school and voice their concern about racism or discrimination. All students wanted to see more discussion between administrators and persons of all colors.

All of the students and administrators felt that uneducated and uninformed students are the biggest offenders. One student said he did not blame the students but rather the parents. He said "they had to learn to dislike Black people somewhere." Those asked also felt that Black students are guilty of racism. The following examples were given.

1. Making or accepting assumptions about the behavior of white persons.

2. Reacting negatively to white men dating Black women.
3. Telling white jokes and using abusive language.
4. Staying in groups and not associating with white students.

Combating Racism

A review of modern history in America will underline the fact that racism will not go away on its own. Unfortunately, racism has become part of society and over the years has been evolving on the college campus. Racism has proven to be a formidable foe for those charged with the advancement of cultural diversity and educational excellence.

In recent years colleges and universities are voicing their concern. Entire conferences and institutes are being dedicated exclusively to putting an end to racism on the college campus. The post-conference publication Racial Discrimination on Campus (1988) suggest that colleges and universities target four specific areas:

1. Academic and classroom environment
2. Campus social climate
3. Promoting awareness and appreciation of diversity
4. Management strategies for responding to racial incidents.

An examination for these four target areas will show a real need for mentoring and role model development. Discussion between minority and majority students as well as open discussion on the topics of cultural diversity and racism will help evaluate the campus social climate as well as promoting cultural appreciation. Examining management strategies for responding to racial incidents may show an area for improvement by generating questions that need answers. For example, what are appropriate disciplinary actions for overt acts of racism? Should there be a

written statement of policy?

The Student Affairs Institute held at Iowa State University in the Summer of 1988 ended with great reviews - the major topics of discussion centered around minority issues. The institute ended with a brain storming program designed to generate ideas about minority recruitment and retention. The following ideas were put forth for discussion as possible new programs.

1. Colleges should provide one inservice per semester for staff and faculty to discuss cultural awareness.
2. Ask minorities to take leadership roles.
3. Use the residence hall to create a learning environment where cultural diversity and sensitivity training can be accomplished.
4. The institution must articulate institution commitment to the integration of cultural diversity.
5. Take minority alumnus on recruiting trips.
6. Network with graduate schools to develop relationships with minority graduate students who seek administrative or faculty positions in a college environment.

Colleges and universities in Iowa are aware of the significance of cultural diversity and the problems associated with racism. When administrators were asked what can be done to combat racism, they provided the following responses:

1. Create new pluralistic communities.
2. Educate students about the problems of racism.
3. An emphasis must be put on hiring role models.
4. Do a better job recruiting minority students.
5. Add classes that promote understanding of races and cultures.

6. Perform a racism audit.
7. Begin a mentoring program.
8. Facilitate discussions between Black and white students.
9. Speak out loudly against racism in any form.

Conclusion

This study of Black student and Student Affairs perspectives in regard to racism has provided a clear understanding of racism on the Iowa college campus. A careful review of the participant's responses leaves little room for the Pollyanna argument that racism does not exists on the Iowa college campus. The study also points out that racism may be more serious than just a lack of sensitivity.

The study did produce several reasons to look forward to the future. First, administrators do not seem content to wait for something to happen. They are taking the initiative - trying to maintain a preventative posture. Second, Black students feel that administrators are doing a good job and are approachable. And finally, both students and administrators feel that racist acts are unacceptable and those who follow that path should be dealt with in a swift and firm way.

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